Engaging People, Linking the World –
Broadband Planning Activities Update Report

The Nebraska Information Technology Commission Community Council (NITC),
University of Nebraska - Lincoln (UNL), Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) and
the AIM Institute are cooperatively leading the effort to address the broadband planning needs of
Nebraska's communities. The update is focused around the three project areas – Capacity Building,
Technical Assistance and Regional Planning.

Capacity Building - *$715,538 Direct; $885,417 Total*
This project will benchmark technology use across relevant community sectors; set goals for
improved technology use within each sector; and develop a plan for achieving its goals, with specific
recommendations for web-based application development and demand creation. Projects include:
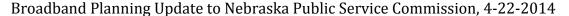
- ***Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska: Household Survey* UNL.** Nebraskans were
  surveyed about their computer and Internet usage, challenges and desires for the future.
  6600 Nebraskans were surveyed in February 2010 – 47% response rate. Survey results are
  available at broadband.nebraska.gov. Status: Follow-up Survey conducted Q1 2014. A 35%
  response rate was achieved. Some preliminary findings include: More than eight in ten
  Nebraska households (82%) currently have broadband Internet service compared to 76%
  households in 2010. During the past four years the proportion of persons age 65 and older
  having broadband service at home increased from 48 percent to 64 percent. And, the
  proportion of persons with the lowest household incomes having broadband service at home
  increased from 44 percent to 53 percent.
- ***Business Survey* DED.** Businesses will be surveyed through the Business Retention and
  Expansion process to identify the strengths and challenges they face in utilizing technology.
  Businesses continue to be surveyed using DED's BR&E program. Data has been gathered from
  over 400 key businesses. Sixteen communities currently hold a licenses to input data in
  eSynchronist. Status: DED continues to encourage communities to share broadband data in
  the BR&E program.
- ***Inventory of Broadband and Digital Literacy Programs* UNL.** In order to identify potential
  partners and to avoid duplication of efforts, an inventory of broadband and digital literacy
  programs will be conducted. *Status:* Resources continue to be gathered and updated. Focus
  is evolving to provide resources to assist businesses in making decisions on whether or not to
  adopt technologies that utilize broadband as well as education/training materials.
- ***Focused Surveys* UNL**. Focused surveys in regions where there are large numbers of non-adopters
  will help to better understand how to increase broadband adoption. The focused survey effort will
  primarily be around business and we are working with the Strategic Network Group (SNG) to
  conduct the business survey, establish benchmarks and to provide tools to share with
  businesses.*Status:* Report released Q1. Responses show that broadband is being widely used
  and is benefiting businesses across the state. For example: Broadband use is having a positive
  impact on jobs, with 364 respondents reporting a net increase of 654 jobs due to using the
  Internet.   Over 50% of net jobs reported by respondents were attributed to use of the
  Internet; and, broadband use is also having a positive impact on business revenue with typical
  respondents reporting 25 to 45 percent of revenue from the Internet.

- ***Government and Economic Developer Survey*** *UNL*. Nebraska Economic Development Association, Nebraska Association of County Officials and League of Nebraska Municipality surveys were conducted in 2012. *Status:* The NEDA report influenced the decision to conduct a more in-depth business survey and to build capacity amongst economic developers to better understand the technology needs of businesses in their communities.
- ***Creating Broadband Plan/Administrative*** *UNL.* Regional technology plans as well as a statewide report and recommendations will be created through project. *Status:* Continue to explore ways to draw individuals to the broadband map and overall project. Having a presence at Statewide Conferences is one way to gather feedback and interest. The broadband initiative had a presence at both Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) where youth were asked how satisfied they are with their internet access. 68.4% of the FBLA youth indicated they were satisfied compared to 75.44% of the FFA participants. This was surprising given the higher representation from rural communities. Consistently youth commented that there was a need for higher speed and consistent service especially for those living outside of city limits.

Technical Assistance - *$1,064,471 Direct; $1,193,068 Total*
The Nebraska Broadband Technical Assistance Program will provide technical assistance on supporting entrepreneurs through technology, and other topics to local governments, chambers of commerce, and economic developers especially in areas with lower than average broadband subscribership. Projects include:

- ***Statewide Conference*** *AIM Institute*. Conduct Statewide Conference focused on broadband adoption and utilization. *Status*. The 2014 Broadband Connecting Nebraska Conference will once again be held at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney on October 1 & 2. Planning for the agenda is underway, and attendance is expected to grow both in numbers and geographic reach. A youth track is planned once again, and we have tentative confirmation to speak from Keith Adams, Deputy Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service, USDA Rural Development. The conference will take place in the same general time frame as the release of the Statewide Broadband Plan. Consideration is being given to constructing the conference agenda to highlight elements of the plan.
- ***Regional Workshops*** *UNL*. Regional Workshops will be held to address specific issues related to an area on broadband adoption and utilization. Status: Over 140 businesses/organizations attended eight technology fairs held regionally. The fairs featured opportunities for business owners, ag producers and communities to learn about how to utilize broadband/technology. Comments included that the mapping information was just what I needed to we wanted to move to the cloud and many of my questions were answered.
- ***Webinars*** *UNL*. Up to four webinars will be held each year of the grant to address broadband adoption and utilization. *Status:* Webinars are archived at http://broadband.nebraska.gov/events
- ***Best Practice Videos*** *UNL/AIM Institute*.   At least 20 examples of best practices in expanding broadband adoption across Nebraska will be highlighted. *44 videos have now been launched through the broadband efforts with 7 additional topical videos launched in Q1 2014. Best practice videos have highlighted the benefits of broadband technology and the seven new videos feature topics such as mobile apps and choosing a cloud provider. In total, there have*

been 3245 views of the various videos with an additional 500 views in Q1 2014. Videos are archived at http://broadband.nebraska.gov/videos or visit the Youtube channel has been created to host the videos - Http://Youtube.com/broadbandnebraska.

- **Entrepreneur Acceleration System (EAS)** DED**.** An entrepreneurial mentoring program will focus on the human capital of the founders and their core teams that includes addressing how broadband can help strengthen entrepreneurs in the state. *Status*: The broadband component of this activity is complete.

- **Technical Assistance Expertise** UNL/Steering Team. The focus of this effort will be to provide technical assistance in the area of business and entrepreneurism to chambers of commerce, economic developers, and local and county stakeholders statewide and regionally to increase broadband adoption. *Status:* Coaches are actively meeting with businesses. To date, 210 scorecards were released to businesses. Coaches have connected with 42 (20%) of the businesses. Of the businesses that have been reached, coaches have met with 12 businesses (29% of the 42) and 24 (57%) were not interested in meeting. Of the 12 businesses that have met with coaches, 11 (91.7%) are currently moving to some type of action. Actions include adopting remote sensing in an industry to developing a new website. Businesses are being connected with experts to assist them in making the best decision when moving forward. Additional technical assistance has been established that will help businesses that participated in the survey to understand the effectiveness of their technology usage.

- **Broadband Portal Development** UNL. Develop a central broadband portal which will serve as a source of information on broadband efforts in Nebraska. *Status*: Website officially launched in April 2012. Since that time there have been 19,585 visits and 13,075 unique visitors with an average visit of 3:54. During the last quarter January through March, there were 2,822 visits and 2,242 unique visitors. Marketing efforts continue to draw people to the website. Visitor top stops were to surveys, the broadband map and business efforts.

Local and Regional Planning - *$318,049 Direct; $394,177 Total Budget*

The Nebraska Broadband Local/Regional Technology Planning Teams program will augment regional planning approaches identified in the initial grant application with community planning, business and entrepreneurial discussions, government discussions, and agricultural discussions.

- **Regional Planning Teams** UNL. Regional planning teams will be formed to create the regional plans. *Status:* The regional plans were completed during Q3 2013 and featured at the Nebraska Broadband Conference during Q4 2013. No matter the region a common vision is that all residents and businesses will have access to digital information and communication tools and the training to skillfully use. Long term goals consistent among all regions include the attraction and retention of population – including youth retention; increase in economic development; increase in well-being/quality of life; and decrease in the digital divide – rural and urban.

- **Statewide Plan** NITC. Planning is underway in four priority areas for the Nebraska Statewide Plan. Those priorities are: Digital Literacy and Adoption/Advanced Technology Training; Broadband Availability and Affordability; Economic Development; and Agriculture

  The priority areas were those that the regions felt there was the most opportunity to increase the adoption and utilization of broadband. In addition, other priority actions identified are local

government, education, health care and non-profits/helping individuals access human services online. Planning meetings have been held in each of the priority areas. May 2014 has been set as the deadline for completing the statewide plan.

- ***Community Planning – North and South Omaha*** *UNL/AIM Institute in North and South Omaha.* North and South Omaha were identified as underserved regions/areas through the survey of Nebraska households. *Status:* Strategic plan has been completed for the North/South Omaha planning project. The next step is to work with community partners to explore how to best provide effective education and build awareness of how non-profits can increase their influence and effectively deliver services using technology.
- ***Community Planning - Cultural and Unserved Communities*** *UNL.* Additional community or local planning teams in regions/areas identified as underserved through the survey of Nebraska households and broadband mapping data. *Status:* A session with the tribal colleges has been posted until late Q2 due to schedule conflicts. The goal of the session will be to have a better understanding of what devices (i.e., computes, iPads) the tribal members have, what they do not have and what is their highest priority in terms of electronic communication. The goal will be to increase their awareness and use of technology.
- ***Focus Groups*** *UNL.* Seven to 10 focus groups will be held with anchor institutions and utility providers as well as populations with low usage rates. *Status:* In 2013, 17 Focus Groups were held with 105 individuals participating to better understand the challenges and opportunities in the various regions of the state. Communities with adequate broadband focused on the opportunities. When broadband was not as reliable, the focus became on the challenges. Additional focus groups/listening sessions may be held to help move the initiative forward.
- ***Community Sector Discussions*** *UNL.* Community sector discussions will be held to further advance adoption of technology in specific industries such as business and entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce, agriculture and the health industry. The focus of each discussion will be to benchmark technology use across the specific sectors, set goals for improved technology, and develop a plan to achieve goals. *Status:* The community sector discussions will be held as needed in support of the statewide plan.

Project Partner Steering Team:
AIM Institute, Rod Armstrong
State of Nebraska
      Nebraska Department of Economic Development – Allison Hatch
      Nebraska Information Technology Commission – Anne Byers
University of Nebraska Lincoln
      Ag Economics – Charlotte Narjes, Becky Vogt, Jan Cejka, Jim Keeler
      Extension – Connie Hancock

For more information, contact Charlotte Narjes at cnarjes@unl.edu or Connie Hancock at chancock1@unl.edu.